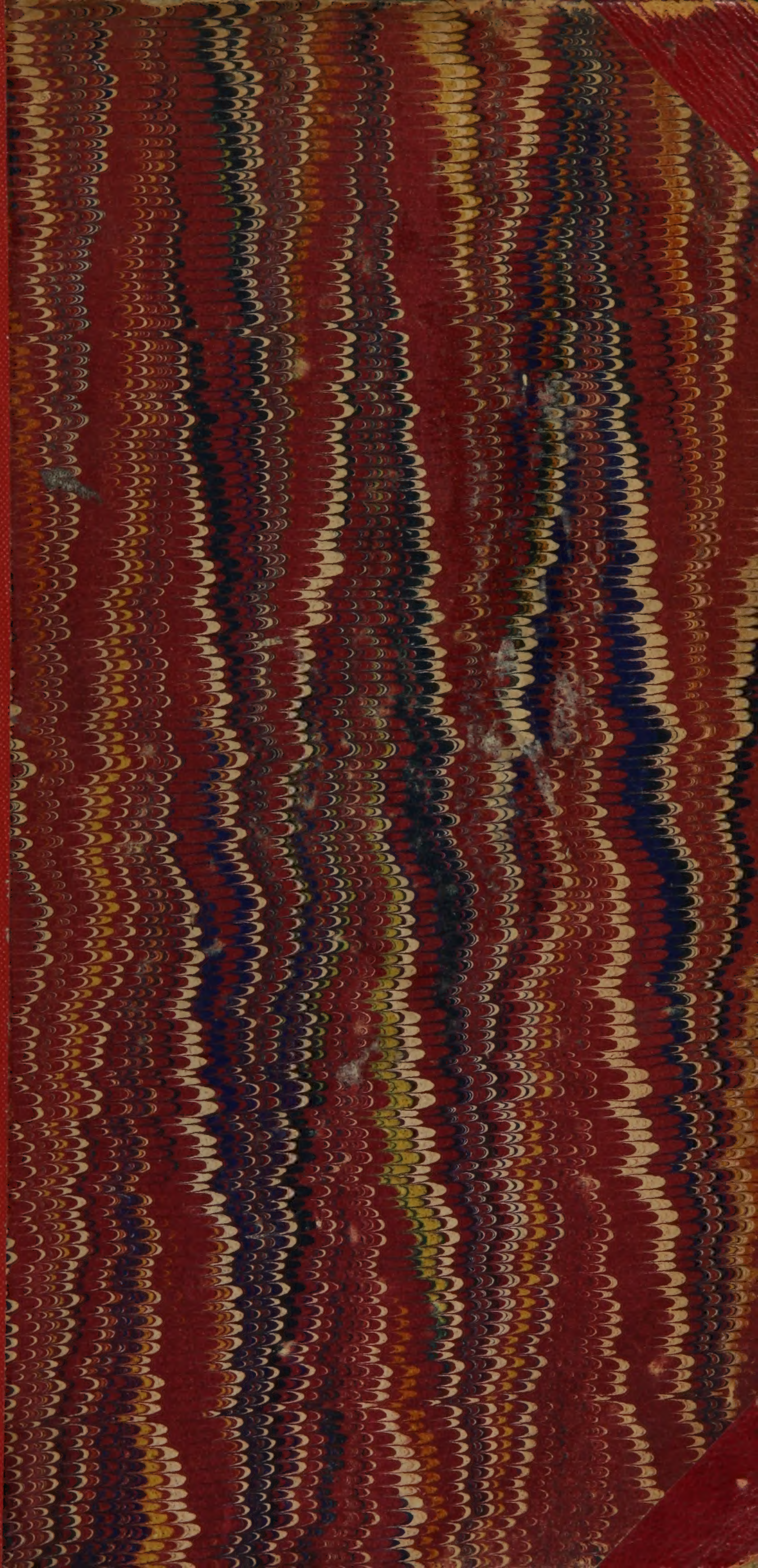


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ADDRESS

OF

PROFESSOR N. R. SMITH,

CONCERNING THE LATE

DR. JNO. H. O'DONOVAN,

BEFORE THE

Medical and Chirurgical Faculty of Maryland.

Dr. Charles Donovan
Compliment of Dr. Dr. Samuel

ADDRESS

OF

PROF. N. R. SMITH

BEFORE THE

Medical and Chirurgical Faculty

OF

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MR. PRESIDENT AND MEMBERS OF THE
MEDICO-CHIRURGICAL SOCIETY :

Gentlemen,—

In one respect, though not in others, you have done well in selecting me for the sad office, the duties of which I now endeavor to perform. The subject of these remarks, Dr. JOHN H. O'DONOVAN, was my friend, "faithful and just to me" through the long period of nearly half a century. I have therefore every motive to be faithful and just to his memory.

But if I come to honor him, it is not by adulation. "Flattery will not soothe the dull, cold ear of death," nor "honor's voice provoke the silent dust." I am here to speak only "what I do know." You all did love him once, you love his memory now, not without cause.

It has been said that "the good which men do is oft interred with their bones." This is eminently untrue

in regard to the faithful and wise physician. His good deeds, his active benevolence, live after him, and their influence is felt by posterity.

Dr. JOHN H. O'DONOVAN, the subject of these remarks and of our profound regret, was born in Ireland in 1802. His father, Michael O'Donovan, was a respectable member of the medical profession, and was a graduate of Trinity College, Dublin, of the year 1795. His wife, the mother of John H., died while he was yet a child, and he was placed under the care of an aunt, who devoted her life to his moral and literary education. His father determined to settle in America, and selected Charleston as their future home. After having gone there alone, he directed John and his aunt to meet him there. They arrived in Baltimore, and there received letters instructing them to remain in that city till an epidemic of yellow fever, then raging in Charleston, should have subsided. While awaiting further advices, intelligence arrived of his father's death by yellow fever. His father's means having been placed in the hands of a mercantile house which, shortly after, failed, he was thus left almost penniless.

Our friend inherited the fondness of his father for the medical profession, and, under many disadvantages, began its study and graduated from the University of Maryland in 1824.

He immediately commenced the practice of his profession, and continued it with unremitted industry up to within an hour of his sudden death.

We here see, in his early history, a striking, but not solitary, instance of the successful pursuit of knowledge and of fortune under adverse circumstances. It cannot be doubted that the very effort which the mind is compelled to make, when pursuing an object under difficulties, increases its power, just as the exercise of the muscles, when compelled to exertion, increases their volume and strength. The man who, in early life, encounters obstacles, and is roused to the effort necessary to overcome them, not only has his intellect thereby quickened and developed, but acquires also a determined will, which makes him a victor in the whole battle of life. This undoubtedly is the reason why so many who have been forced to contend with adversity in early life have become, in so many instances, the most distinguished in every department

of science and of art, while those of equal, or perhaps superior, powers, nurtured in the lap of wealth and fostered by patronage, have been left far behind in the race for distinction. Necessity is said to be the mother of invention. With equal truth may it be pronounced the mother, at least the foster mother, of every faculty of the mind.

Our departed brother, having accomplished his honorable career, might indeed have looked back with peculiar satisfaction upon those necessities which had cherished within him a vigorous intellect and a determined will.

When the speaker came to Baltimore in 1827, having been elected to the chair of Surgery in the University of Maryland, he found Dr. O'DONOVAN successfully and respectably engaged in the practice of his profession. It was my good fortune to make his acquaintance at once—an acquaintance which ripened into friendship uninterrupted till his death; nay, a friendship which, after death, prompts me to feebly do honor to his memory.

Dr. O'DONOVAN, as you are aware, practised labor-

iously up to the very hour of his dissolution, which occurred suddenly on the 18th of June, 1869.

On returning from a laborious round of visits, and after prescribing for several office patients, he retired for a few moments' rest, and, after a brief space, was found lifeless upon his couch, there being no impress of the agony of death upon his generous features.

When, by the slow and inevitable progress of chronic disease, death robs us of our friends, we are at least prepared for the sad event, and the shock is mitigated; but when one is struck down, thus suddenly, by the vengeful destroyer, in the midst of his usefulness, and moving among us up to the hour of his death, the shock is infinitely greater, and profoundly impresses us with the uncertainty of life.

By the death of our friend, a chasm was left in the ranks of our profession not easy to fill; but I may congratulate his family, the public, and the profession, that he has left behind him, in our ranks, a son who is the inheritor of his excellent qualities. Surely the veteran yields to death with less regret when he sees the honor of his name likely to be sustained in another generation.

I shall not grieve the spirit of our departed friend by extravagant eulogy. The plain, unvarnished truth (and he was himself the very impersonation of truth), if rightly uttered, is enough to satisfy those who are ambitious for him.

Dr. O'DONOVAN "kept the noiseless tenor of his way along the cool, sequestered vale of his profession." He was never a public man. Never a public man, do I say? In one sense, he was eminently a public man: he was the untiring servant of the public by night and by day. He was public property, at the command of rich and poor. I mean that he was no seeker of public office or position. He was never a professor, though he might have instructed many who bear that title.

Our friend's mind was thoroughly imbued with the principles of his profession. Beginning with a complete education, he by no means remained satisfied with his attainments or with the acquisition of a diploma. The knowledge which he had acquired only stimulated him to the acquisition of more.

In the numerous consultations which I have had with him, during nearly half a century, in relation to

almost every form of disease, I was astonished at the amount of practical information which he possessed, and especially that which had been the result of his own observation. I may truly say that I never consulted with him without being instructed.

Dr. O'DONOVAN was, in a remarkable degree, possessed of that quality of the mind called plain common sense, which after all is the most *uncommon* sense. Without some degree of this attribute of the mind it must be admitted that quartos of knowledge are of but little avail to the practitioner. Our friend's perceptive faculties were of the highest order. His intellectual vision penetrated the most obscure recesses of disease. Nor was his judgment in the selection and application of the remedy less remarkable.

There is a vast difference among men as to the degree of benefit which they derive from their own experience. He benefits in greatest degree who exercises accurate observation, a good memory, and a sound judgment. These qualities of the mind our friend possessed in the highest degree. But let it not be supposed that he restricted himself to his own experience alone. There are those who affect a con-

tempt for book knowledge, as it is sometimes contemptuously termed. But good books present the recorded experience of many.

There is a vast difference also among men as to the amount of profit with which they read. Our friend, O'DONOVAN, was not one of those who are diverted from the true path of science by those false lights which, like *ignes fatui*, only divert the pursuer from the truth and leave him in obscurity. In a department of knowledge which cannot yet be ranked among the exact sciences, these delusions are common and mischievous. To read and appreciate correctly, therefore, requires discrimination like that of our friend. He was never, like some, eager to seize upon and employ new remedies till their true value had been cautiously tested. He never made the stomachs of his patients the laboratory for adventurous experiments.

There are not a few practitioners, if I mistake not, who are ambitious to signalize themselves by the first use of new remedies, or the new application of old ones. In doing so they often abandon the use of more efficient means, and those with the effects of which they are familiar.

Among a series of "wise saws and modern instances" I recently met with this: "Be slow to abandon old friends; be slower still to make new ones." These precepts are in point.

If I mistake not, there are consulting physicians and surgeons in the world who are ever on the "*qui vive*" to outdo others by some far-fetched and untried expedient. The famous Blumenbach said to the advocates of a new doctrine: "Gentlemen, there is much in your system that is new, and much that is true, but unfortunately that which is true is not new, and that which is new is not true."

Dr. O'DONOVAN was not one of those who are sectarians in medical science. He was never the slave of a dogma—never the blind follower of extremists. He was the follower of great innovators only as far as, in his opinion, they were rational and right. He was not a submissive disciple of Broussais, of Brown, of Rush, or of Bennett, but he neglected not to cull from the systems of all that which was good and true. As the magnet selects atoms of steel from a mass of rubbish, so does the elective affinity of a strong mind appropriate the truth.

When the speaker came to Baltimore, in 1827, many of the leading practitioners were the disciples of Rush. Inflammation was regarded as the essence of all disease, and the lancet the great remedy. It occurred to me to see much of the practice which was founded on these principles. I have seen bleeding freely practiced in pulmonary consumption, in typhus, in typhoid fevers. I have seen anemia, characterized as it often is by occasional violent reaction in the heart and arteries, treated by the lancet, which was, perhaps, the very agent which had caused the disease. Sangrado, indeed, was outdone.

All this has happily passed away, but it is greatly to be lamented that theorists in receding from one extreme cannot stop at the happy medium, but must necessarily oscillate into the opposite absurdity. Have we not in our time heard the lancet, by some, universally condemned as a remedial agent, and calomel and tartar emetic stigmatized as poisons? and do they not contend for treatment directly the opposite of that the success of which was boasted of by the theorists of fifty years ago?

How must the confidence of all reflecting minds be

impaired in the positiveness of our science when contemplating such extraordinary contradictions, especially when the extremists of the right and left give statistical evidence of the same degree of success, and perhaps with equal truth! Is it surprising that empiricism should avail itself of these inconsistencies and triumph by our divisions?

Happily not all of our profession are thus swept backward and forward by the ebb and flow of this tide of theoretical opinion. They are the light, fragile, and buoyant materials which are tossed backward and forward by the tidal wave, while the rock of truth, though at times submerged, remains stationary.

Our departed friend never yielded his convictions to what I may term an epidemic theory. To the last year of his life he practiced on the same principles which in the beginning of his career had made him so eminently successful.

The success and consequent extent of Dr. O'DONOVAN'S practice are evidences of the soundness of his principles, as well as his devotion to his profession.

Probably no man in our profession toiled more laboriously, or visited a greater number of patients.

This was the more remarkable inasmuch as he labored under a physical infirmity—an atrophy of one of his lower extremities, which caused a painful lameness. This was aggravated during the last few years of his life by an accident happening to the same member—a fracture of the cervix femoris, for which the speaker treated him. This would have discouraged any ordinary man in regard to further labor in his profession especially as his pecuniary circumstances would have allowed him rest. In eight weeks he was again upon his rounds.

It was his excessive toil by night and day which probably caused the malady which so suddenly arrested his career. In laboring to parry the weapon of death from the hearts of others, he exposed his own noble breast to the fatal dart.

Death, as if indignant at being so often foiled by his skill, struck him down in the midst of his usefulness.

And here let me remark, especially for the instruction of the younger members of the profession, that, if any one circumstance more than another contributed to Dr. O'DONOVAN'S success and the unbounded

confidence placed in him by his patients, it was the profound interest which he felt and manifested in their welfare. Patients of the most obtuse sensibilities and intellect, even children, never fail to discover when their medical attendant feels an anxious interest to do them good. Confidence thus acquired immensely aids the practitioner in effecting his benevolent purpose.

During the latter years of his life, Dr. O'DONOVAN was much employed as a consulting physician. For this, not only did his great experience and judgment qualify him, but also, in an eminent degree, his delicate sense of professional etiquette. His soul was the residence of honor, and no man hesitated to put the untold gold of his reputation in his keeping.

No man more completely than Dr. O'DONOVAN ever illustrated the sentiment of the poet: "An honest man's the noblest work of God."

I will not say that our friend affected those blandishments of manner which sometimes pass for politeness; nevertheless, if not at every point displaying superficial polish, he was a diamond to the very core.

If his manner and expression were sometimes harsh and severe, it was only when his patients disregarded

his advice and gave provocation by neglecting that which was for their own good ; and if, then, he departed from his usual benevolence of expression and used an offensive expletive, well might “the accusing spirit, as he flew up to heaven’s chancery with the expression, blush when he gave it in, and the recording angel, as he wrote down, drop a tear upon the record and blot it out forever.”

Take him for all in all, my friends, we shall rarely look upon his like again ; and in conclusion I will say that, if these crude, though just, remarks shall cause his memory to be in any degree more cordially cherished, and his bright example to be more faithfully followed, I shall have accomplished my purpose.

“ Sweet sleeps the man who sinks to rest
By all his brethren’s wishes blest.”

